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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1993
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 4321
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

UNCLAS KABUL 004152

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR SCA.FO DAS CAMP, SCA/A, G/IWI
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE
NSC FOR JWOOD
OSD FOR KIMMETT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: WOMEN GATHER PUBLICLY TO PRAY FOR PEACE

11. (U) On December 12, mostly unidentified organizers coordinated separate public gatherings of Afghan women in six cities across the provinces of Balkh, Ghazni, Helmand, Herat, Kabul and Kandahar to pray for "an end to war and destruction." According to media and eyewitness reports, the women gathered at mosques and shrines to pray and recite verses of the Koran. The gatherings numbered in the hundreds at each site. Media reports estimated total participants across the country at about 1,000. Between sessions of formal prayer, individual women shared publicly stories about family members they had lost to the conflict and described how violence had changed their lives.

12. (SBU) The prayer gatherings, organizers have declined to be named for fear of retaliation. The provincial director of the Women's Affairs Ministry in Balkh province told us Saifura Niyazi, a member of parliament from Balkh, had helped organize the gathering in that province. Reportedly, the prayer gatherings in insurgent-plagued Kandahar and Helmand were particularly well attended. The gatherings coincided with the multi-day Afghan-ISAF drive to recapture Musa Qala district in northern Helmand province from the Taliban; however, the women did not seem to be protesting or reacting to that military operation.

13. (SBU) Mass public gatherings of women are unusual in Afghanistan. Women maintain very low profiles, especially in the Pashtun-dominated southern provinces. Nevertheless, on June 14, in what appears to have been the first event of this type, several hundred Afghan women and girls, accompanied by male relative chaperones, gathered at the Shrine of the Prophet in Kandahar, a conservative mosque that is normally closed to women. The shrine's mullah allowed the women to pray collectively for peace through the mosque's public address system and individually recite verses from the Koran. Neither the June 14 event nor the much larger December 12 gatherings were publicized in advance, possibly because of security concerns.

14. (SBU) Comment: The December 12 prayer gatherings seemed to be apolitical pleas for peace. The women, apparently, did not take the opportunity to blame either ISAF or the insurgents for the war. The media relayed no complaints about collateral civilian casualties due to ISAF military

operations. If the prayer gatherings, participants escape retaliation, we would not be surprised to see a repetition of the event on a larger scale.

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